DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 119 RC 019 221

AUTHOR Hadley, Marilyn; Wood, Robert W.
TITLE Teen Workers: Developing a Work Ethic or Gratifying Material Needs?
PUB DATE [90]
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Administrator Attitudes; High Schools; *High School Students; Principals; *Rural Education; School District Size; *Student Employment; *Work Ethic
IDENTIFIERS *South Dakota

ABSTRACT

Secondary school administrators in South Dakota were surveyed concerning the status of working teenagers. A questionnaire was sent to all public school principals (N=182) who had students in grades 9-12; 149 principals or 82% responded. Results indicate that 30 percent of South Dakota students age 14 years or older work, with the greatest percentage of working students from large school districts. Few schools (18 percent) use a work permit form. A perceived benefit associated with students working is an increased sense of responsibility; however, respondents were split in their perceptions of willingness to stick to a task, sense of accomplishment, and increased self-esteem as benefits of working students. In addition, 22 percent of respondents added money as a benefit for working students. Drawbacks to student employment include decreased school involvement, decreased academic performance, and decreased time spent on homework. Few administrators viewed the effect of working on student learning as a serious problem; most respondents felt this was a slight to moderate problem. (LP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED360119

Teen Workers: Developing a Work Ethic or Gratifying Material Needs?

Written by

Dr. Marilyn Hadley
Chair, Professional Teacher Education Department
University of Nebraska at Kearney
Kearney, NE 68847
308-234-8513

Dr. Robert W. Wood
Professor of Curriculum and Instruction
School of Education
The University of South Dakota
Vermillion, SD 57069
605-677-5832

RC 019221

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Robert W. Wood
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Educators are becoming concerned with the number of teens working and how this affects their work in school. Recent articles and newspaper reports have been written dealing with teen workers in large urban communities, suburban communities, and in foreign countries. This article describes a study dealing with teen workers in a sparsely populated rural state.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Teen Workers: Developing a Work Ethic or Gratifying Material Needs?

Dr. Marilyn Hadley

Dr. Robert W. Wood

Recently, there have been indicators of a growing realization of a potential problem with teenagers working during the school year. Educators as well as the public have been concerned with "at risk students" and low overall performance of American students for some time. However, the public may be less aware of educators' increasing concerns about working teenagers.

A glance at recent newspaper articles and professional publications hint at the concern. During the past few years, newspapers described former Secretary of Labor Elizabeth Dole's crack down on violators of child-labor laws. "Teens who work may start ignoring real job: School" (December, 1990) was the headline of an article about a new Illinois report on "student-workers at risk". In addition, it has been reported that teenagers in other countries appear to work less frequently than United States teenagers; only 2% of Japanese teenagers and 20% of those in Sweden work (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986).

Greenberger's (1983) research in the area of child-labor found a "delicate" balance between advantages and disadvantages of working during the school year. In fact,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

eight states passed legislation in 1989 regulating some aspect of child labor (Nelson, 1990). While previous studies seem to indicate that teenagers in middle income suburban areas are most likely to work, there is little information about working teenagers in rural areas (Workman, 1990).

With these concerns in mind, we decided to poll secondary administrators in South Dakota about the status of working teenagers. South Dakota has one of the highest graduation rates in the US and has a large number of high school graduates going on to post-secondary education.

PROCEDURES

A questionnaire was sent to all public school principals in South Dakota who had students in grades 9-12. One hundred eighty-two (182) secondary principals received the questionnaire. Eighty-two percent, or 149 questionnaires, were used. The questionnaire asked principals to respond to 5 basic questions: (1) Approximately what percentage of your students 14 years of age or older have a job?, (2) Does your school have a work permit form which students, parents, and school officials sign?, (3) What do your perceive as benefits for working students?, (4) What do your perceive as drawbacks for working students?, and (5) To what extent has working interfered with students' academic performance in your school? Research findings (Greenberger, 1983) were used in developing benefits and drawbacks.

Each questionnaire was coded so that the investigators could classify responses by school district size. A small

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

school district has 1-299 students in kindergarten through grade twelve: a medium school district has 300 through 1,199 students; and a large school district has 1,200 students or more.

Fifty-eight (95%) questionnaires were returned from small school districts, 58 (77%) from medium school districts, and 33 (77%) from large school districts.

FINDINGS

The estimated mean percentage of South Dakota students age 14 years or older with a job is 30%. This percentage varies by size of school, with the greatest percentage of working students being in large school districts. Responses ranged from 0% of students working in two small school districts to 90% in two other small school district where most students do farm chores. The percentage of working students is probably higher than actually reported, since a number of respondents from small and medium size schools noted that students living on farms are required to do chores but did not include these students in their estimate. Mean percentages from all categories of schools on this topic are shown in Table 1.

Insert table 1 here

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The second question asked if schools have a work permit form which students, parents, and school officials sign. Respondents indicated that few schools use a work permit form. Table 2 reflects responses by school category on this question.

Insert table 2 here

When asked to check which of 4 benefit statements would apply to their students, respondents agreed that an increased sense of responsibility was a positive outcome of working. There was less agreement on the other three benefit statements. More than 22% of the respondents added "money" as an additional benefit for their students. Table 3 indicates responses on the question for school category.

Insert table 3 here

When asked to check which of 4 drawback statements would apply to their students, respondents of all school categories agreed that three were most likely to happen: decreased school involvement, decreased academic performance, and decreased time spent on homework. Respondents were divided in their perceptions toward decreased enjoyment of school as a serious drawback for working students. Responses about drawbacks are shown in Table 4.

Insert table 4 here

The fifth and final question asked respondents to estimate the extent working has interfered with students' academic performance. Few view the effect of working on student learning to be a serious problem. Most respondents feel this is a slight to moderate problem. See Table 5 for a breakdown by school categories.

Insert table 5 here

CONCLUSIONS

One out of three students age 14 or older in South Dakota has a job while attending high school. For those working students the benefits and drawbacks are similar to the findings by Greenberger (1983). An increased sense of responsibility is a major benefit. Respondents were split in their perceptions of willingness to stick to a task, sense of accomplishment, and increased self-esteem. Although 22% of the respondents identified making money as a benefit, comments indicate that money is used for immediate pleasures such as cars, videos, clothes, and drugs. On the other hand, decreased school involvement, decreased academic performance, and decreased time spent on homework are

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

perceived as drawbacks for working South Dakota students.

Comments by respondents indicated that student employment is a concern of teachers because of decreased academic performance and increased apathy toward school. Activity programs have suffered considerably. Others indicated that working students are growing up too fast by working so many hours after school and on weekends, thus missing out on extra-curricular activities. Many believe it is the student who can best afford academically to work that are employed.

Several respondents indicated that the number of hours students work should be limited (15 and 20 were suggested maximums). Other respondents suggested that students should not work after 11 at night and that students should not be allowed to work until they are juniors in high school. It was also suggested that employers need to cooperate with school officials by not calling students during school hours and not assigning excessive work hours.

One respondent eloquently described the dilemma as a choice between academic excellence and responsible work ethics. While working may be good for some students, and not for others who are less mature and/or don't know their limits, we wonder if the attention students place on getting money to purchase items places on undue emphasis on short term gratification of material needs. Are students who do not have time to participate in extra-curricular activities, who do not have time to do homework outside

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

school, whose academic performance suffers due to working being prepared for the long term to be good citizens of the twenty-first century?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

References

Greenberger, E. (1983). A researcher in the policy arena: The case of child labor. AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIST, January 104-111.

Greenberger, E., & Steinberg, L. (1986). WHEN TEENAGERS WORK: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL COSTS OF ADOLESCENT EMPLOYMENT. New York: Basic Books.

Nelson, R. R. (1990). State labor legislation enacted in 1989. MONTHLY LABOR REVIEW, January, 35-55.

Staff. (1990, December 3). Teens who work may start ignoring real job: School. OMAHA WORLD HERALD, p. G1.

Workman, B. (1990). The teenager and the world of work: Alienation at west high? PHI DELTA KAPPAN, 71 (8), 628-631.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 1. Mean percentage of students 14 years of age or older with a job

Category	Percentage of Working Students
Small	24%
Medium	32%
Large	40%
Total	30%

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 2. Schools with a work permit form

Category	Small	Medium	Large	Total
Yes	10%	21%	24%	18%
No	90%	79%	76%	82%

Table 3. Perceived benefits for working students

Category	Small	Medium	Large	Total
Increased sense of responsibility	79%	79%	72%	78%
Willingness to stick to a task	48%	38%	48%	44%
Sense of accomplishment	54%	47%	70%	54%
Increased self-esteem	60%	45%	64%	54%
Other--money	20%	21%	28%	22%

Table 4. Perceived drawbacks for working students

Category	Small	Medium	Large	Total
Decreased school involvement	86%	79%	91%	85%
Decreased academic performance	71%	78%	73%	74%
Decreased enjoyment of school	36%	48%	58%	46%
Decreased time spent on homework	88%	88%	94%	89%

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 5. Extent to which working interferes with students' academic performance

Category	Small	Medium	Large	Total
No Problem	14%	7%	3%	9%
Slight Problem	43%	21%	21%	30%
Average Problem	38%	52%	49%	46%
Serious Problem	3%	14%	18%	11%
Very Serious Problem	0%	5%	6%	3%
No Answer	2%	2%	3%	2%

BEST COPY AVAILABLE